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ABSTRACT

Seven components of an academic advising program that emphasizes student retention are examined. These components are as follows: an institutional commitment to academic advising, a faculty-endorsed statement of adviser responsibilities (with retention as a major emphasis), the training of advisers, an adviser evaluation and recognition for effective advising, a well-defined referral system, a group of peer advisers to assist faculty advisers, and an information support system. Each term the adviser should percentage of respondents considering an activity to be with the advisee's academic abilities, and both should work on an appropriate long-range academic plan. Developing an exploratory program including key survey courses and use of specialized campus support services, including the career development and placement office, can be helpful to students and may increase their retention in the university. It is suggested that peer advisers can do much to facilitate the academic adjustment of entering students, and upper-level students can be trained in this peer advising role to support faculty advisers. Peers can help identify students needing in-depth academic advising and provide assistance to faculty with procedural responsibilities. Important sources of academic referral and components of a comprehensive academic information system are examined. References are included. (SW)

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Academic Advising to Facilitate Student Retention

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Academic Advising to Facilitate Student Retention

The financial crisis experienced by many institutions of higher education during the decade of the 1970's prompted a movement toward "the managed university or college." This movement was characterized by a desire to maximize the use of the increasingly scarce human, fiscal, and physical resources. Higher education in the 1980's will be earmarked by a continuing concern for implementing the most cost-effective educational program possible. Undoubtedly, the retention of students through effective and efficient utilization of increasingly scarce resources will be one of several activities that will receive considerable emphasis during a decade of stabilizing and declining enrollments.

The eight integral dimensions of a campus-wide retention program include: a comprehensive, relevant, and enticing curriculum; a faculty committed to individualized instruction; a learning skills program designed to upgrade essential cognitive and affective skills; an admissions process that fosters realistic academic/career planning; an extracurricular activities program designed to facilitate the socialization of students; an accessibility enhanced through development of the appropriate housing and transportation services; the scheduling of programs and courses in accordance with student demand; and the personalized delivery of complex program/course information through effective academic advising. A continuous assessment of why students drop-out or leave the institution should permeate the retention effort. Information collected through this assessment should facilitate all dimensions of the retention planning process.

The purpose of this paper is to describe how academic advising, one of the eight dimensions, can be employed to facilitate student retention. Academic advising has the potential to facilitate retention by stimulating a positive, personalized relationship between student and professor. Such a relationship can evolve into interactions between student and professor that transcends the traditional perception of faculty member as dispenser of knowledge and casual signer of next term's preregistration packet. Hopefully, faculty will interact

with students concerning those needs to which a successful response can make the difference between a student who persists toward a realistic educational goal and one who chooses to drop-out of the institution. The ensuing discussion will summarize the seven components of an academic advising program that emphasizes student retention: an institutional commitme t to academic advising, a faculty-endorsed statement of adviser responsibilities (with retention as a major emphasis), the training of advisers, an adviser evaluation and recognition for effective advising, a well-defined referral system, a group of peer advisers to assist faculty advisers, and an information support system.

Institutional Commitment

Academic advising will not emerge as a critical dimension of a college or university's retention program unless there is a total institutional commitment to this premise. Specifically, faculty must believe that advising is one of their functions and the administration must provide the human, fiscal, and physical resources needed to effectively implement the academic advising program.

The faculty must view advising as one of several functions for which they should be held accountable. Through legislation generated by their faculty senate, the faculty should incorporate advising into those criteria used to gauge faculty performance relative to promotion and tenure. Then, the faculty and the appropriate administrative officers should develop an evaluative approach that elicits valid and reliable data concerning the effectiveness of each adviser.

The administration must provide more than lip-service concerning the importance of academic advising; they must provide sufficient resources. These should include as a minimum: a full-time professional person who is responsible for the organization and administration of the academic advising program; ample clerical assistance (flow of information needed for effective advising will be heavy and continuous); a physical location suitable to house the appropriate personnel

and an academic information center; and a budget sufficient to support a placement testing program, the purchase of various educational materials for the academic information center, and the development of in-service training activities for faculty advisers.

Adviser Responsibilities

The faculty senate of an institution should formulate and endorse a clear statement of adviser responsibilities for the purpose of facilitating student retention. Ideally, the responsibilities of the faculty adviser should be classified into two categories: procedural responsibilities and substantive responsibilities (Kapraun, Coldren, 1978, pp. 3-8).

Procedural responsibilities of academic advising refer to those facets of advising which are preconditions for the effective fullfillment of the substantive responsibilities of academic advising. Procedural responsibilities should be the means to facilitate the implementation of the substantive responsibilities. Basically, the adviser has six procedural responsibilities: to publicize and maintain adequate office hours, to update the advisee list, to maintain a complete and up-to-date record of each advisee's progress, to insure that each advisee possesses or has access to appropriate academic information, to maintain a working knowledge of academic actions which require approval, and to maintain an up-to-date file of academic rule and curricular changes which relate to the academic advising process.

Assuming that the procedural responsibilities of academic advising have been successfully implemented, the faculty adviser through in-depth academic advising can assist each advisee to maximize the use of the educational resources available. The effective execution of the substantive responsibilities of academic advising will significantly influence the retention of students through the development of appropriate educational goals.

After the appropriate information has been collected, reviewed, and internalized, the faculty adviser is well-equipped to assist each advisee in developing a realistic program of study and an appropriate long-range academic plan. Each term a schedule of courses can be developed that is consistent with the student's academic abilities, predetermined by placement test scores and academic progress to date. For students who may be experiencing academic difficulty or who are taking critical survey courses, the adviser's primary concern is to prevent overloading these students with too many courses. Developing a strong academic foundation is essential in all programs. Students who have a basic skill deficiency in writing, reading, or mathematics should be encouraged to eliminate these deficiences as early as possible in their academic program. Stress is placed on the critical importance of basic competencies because of the direct relationship to other skills essential to the completion of degree requirements.

Early in a student's college enrollment, the adviser and advisee should cooperatively develop a realistic academic plan, outlining the tentative academic courses which the student should take during the freshman and sophomore years of college. This plan should include courses that the advisee might study during the next several terms. Naturally, flexibility must exist. Even though changes in the academic plan may develop from one term to the next, an academic plan, nevertheless, will provide the student and adviser with a basis for monitoring progress toward a particular educational goal. Academic progress in key survey courses will provide vital feedback to ascertain the feasibility of continuing a particular program.

The evaluation of academic progress is a second substantive responsibility. Each term the adviser should monitor the academic progress of each advisee by asking such relative questions as: "Is the advisee making satisfactory academic

progress?" "Does the student demonstrate potential for the program under consideration?" "Is the student with outstanding ability being challenged by the academic program?" A careful review of grade reports and discussions with the advisee will provide pertinent information to answer these questions. Once a sound judgement has been made concerning the progress of the advisee, the adviser should provide the advisee with a formative evaluation. This evaluation can consist of a series of recommendations concerning improvement of academic performance, alternative program selection, specialized coursework to determine aptitude for a particular program, or any number of related recommendations.

Undoubtedly, the need to assist each advisee in the initial exploration of an appropriate long-range educational goal is another extremely important substantive responsibility. Two approaches can be used by the adviser to assist the advisee in developing a realistic long-range goal. First, the adviser, remembering that many freshman and sophomore students are considering several academic programs, should help the advisee to develop an appropriate exploratory program. As early as possible, the student should be introduced to key survey courses in his/her academic program. For science-oriented students, key courses should include introductory courses in calculus and chemistry. For non-science students, key survey courses should relate to the program(s) being considered. For example, a political science student should experience an introductory course in national government or American public policy within the first or second term of college attendance. Another student considering education should experience introductory courses in psychology, educational psychology, and cultural foundations of education. At an early stage, the exploratory program should help the student to evaluate the relationship of academic strengths and weaknesses to the educational goal(s) being considered. With feedback from professors (as manifested in grades

and comments concerning potential for success in particular programs) and the intrinsic satisfactions associated with key survey courses, the student can determine the appropriateness of a particular area of study.

The second approach to developing a realistic long-range educational goal is the proper referral by the adviser to various specialized support services available on campus. Many students are concerned about the relationship of an academic program to the job market and often ask, "Will this program prepare me to enter the work force in a challenging and rewarding position?" Referral by the adviser to the career development and placement office allows the student to study vital information concerning career opportunities in various fields. In addition, a competent professional is available for those students who may desire an in-depth analysis of their abilities for various professional careers. Other referrals may relate to the acquisition of financial aid, the improvement of study skills, and the availability of other services designed to facilitate the teaching-learning process. These referrals reflect those types of assistance which will hopefully increase the retention of students, so they will persist to achieve an appropriate educational goal.

Training of Advisers

The development of appropriate training programs will be essential if the adviser is to implement the procedural and substantive responsibilities effectively. Formalized pre-service and in-service training programs should be initiated. As in the development of a master teacher, the assumption cannot be made that a good adviser will develop without participating in a structured training program.

Ideally, a pre-service training program should be developed and required for all new faculty members. This program should consist of a series of modules encompassing those skills an adviser must develop to function effectively at a particular campus. Possible training modules might include: "Organization of

Advising: Responsibilities of the Adviser, Peer Adviser, Advisee, Program Head, Department Chairperson, and Advising Coordinator"; "Referral Services Available On and Off-Campus"; "Essential Advising Skills"; "Advising a Student in Academic Difficulty"; "Scheduling and Academic Planning to Facilitate Student Retention"; "Advising the Undecided Student"; "Interpreting and Using Placement Test Scores"; "Typical Student Academic Problems"; "Personalizing the Information Service"; Advising the Adult Learner"; "Maximizing the Assistance of Peer Advisers"; and "Evaluation of Academic Advising" (Kapraun, 1980, p. 3). Each institution should formulate modules designed to meet training needs unique to the advising process at that institution.

In-service training should be designed to meet the needs of the experienced adviser at various stages of professional development. Periodically, it is essential to collect adviser evaluative data for use in formulating an in-service training program consistent with the needs of each adviser. It is recommended that the dimensions of adviser evaluation should relate as directly as possible to the various training modules. Thereafter, an in-service training program can be designed for each adviser, consisting of those modules wherein the adviser evaluative data indicates a need to improve performance in particular dimensions of advising. For example, the evaluative data of Adviser X may indicate that improvement is needed relative to those dimensions covered by the modules, "Referral Services Available On and Off-Campus" and "Essential Advising Skills"; whereas, Adviser Y's evaluative data may suggest that "Advising the Undecided Student" and "Scheduling and Academic Planning to Facilitate Student Retention" will improve his/her performance.

Adviser Evaluation

Both formative and summative evaluations of advising should be conducted. The formative evaluation is designed to gather information that can be helpful

to the faculty member who wants to improve as an adviser. A summative evaluation is designed to identify and reward the effective adviser (Kapraun, Coldren, 1980, p. 85). To facilitate these evaluations, a valid and reliable evaluation instrument should be developed to assess perceptions of adviser effectiveness. Faculty and student inputs are critical to the development of an acceptable instrument. This instrument should elicit a numercial rating of the adviser relative to the various dimensions of advising activity.

From the perspective of formative evaluation, academic advisers should receive computer print-outs that record their mean scores in each of the advising dimensions. For the purpose of comparison, each adviser receives the mean score of the total faculty in each of the advising dimensions. Consequently, the adviser is provided with a summary of advising effectiveness, both in absolute and relative terms. From this information, the adviser can readily determine areas of strength and weakness, and this awareness of specific areas of weakness in advising can be the first step toward self-improvement. For those advisers who request special assistance in developing strategies to improve their advising, the coordinator of academic advising will provide the appropriate in-service training. From the evaluative data, the coordinator can formulate an individualized in-service program, using those modules reflective of advising weaknesses.

The summative evaluation focuses upon the identification and recognition of the effective adviser. In this regard, the evaluative data might be used in the following ways: to influence promotion/tenure decisions, to provide extra compensation, and to determine the recipient of an advising award or appreciation lunches/dinners. To maximize the impact of the summative evaluation, two principles should be supported: It should be performed by the chief academic officer at the campus, and it must be performed in a systematic and unbiased manner.

One way to perform an effective summative evaluation is to award points to each faculty member on the basis of advising performance. For example, at one institution, faculty evaluation focuses on the rewarding of points for demonstrated performances, relative to the functions of instruction (including advising competence), research, mastery of subject matter, university service, and community service (Kapraun, Coldren, 1980, p. 85). Consequently, evaluative data relative to advising performance becomes a weighted part of a comprehensive "formula" designed to assess the overall effectiveness of each faculty member. This information should be used to determine yearly increments and to influence promotion and tenure decisions.

Peer Advisers

Upper class students should be carefully selected and trained as peer advisers to support faculty advisers. A group of peer advisers can do much to facilitate the academic adjustment of entering students. Specifically, peer advisers can assist in the following ways:

- support faculty advisers in the implementation of certain procedural responsibilities of advising while faculty advisers concentrate on the implementation of substantive responsibilities.
- serve as "big brothers" or "big sisters" and assist in the early identification of students who need in-depth academic advising.
- sponsor activities to enhance the "academic socialization" of students.

A concern in implementing procedural and substantive responsibilities of advising is the possibility that goal displacement (Etzioni, 1964, p. 10) may occur. Without careful execution, the faculty adviser may concentrate on implementing the procedural responsibilities of advising (means to an end) at the expense of achieving the desired student outcomes from performance of the substantive responsibilities. The assignment of a peer adviser to a faculty adviser

or group of advisers to perform procedural responsibilities can minimize goal displacement. For example, the peer adviser could periodically update the advisee list, maintain an updated academic information file, and insure that the adviser's office hours are well-publicized. By freeing the faculty adviser from such routine but essential tasks, the faculty adviser will have more time to assist advisees in developing appropriate academic plans and to monitor their academic progress.

By serving as "big brother or "big sister" to those advisees assigned to a particular adviser, the peer adviser can establish a close and continuous contact with these individuals. The peer adviser can assist in maintaining an open line of communication between advisee and faculty adviser, thus insuring the early referral of a student in academic difficulty. One cautionary comment, relative to the use of peer advisers, should be made: Care must be taken to foster a positive image of the peer adviser. This individual must be viewed as a genuine "helper," not as a "spy" or substitute for the faculty adviser.

"Academic socialization" refers to the development of a personal relationship between an advisee and faculty/staff of the program or department in which the student is enrolled. Beyond this, it entails an identification with the values, ethics, and practices of the professional group the student will eventually enter after the completion of degree requirements. Peer advisers, in cooperation with faculty and students, should sponsor activities to facilitate this process. For example, a club could be formed to sponsor field trips and forensic discussions related to the particular program of study. Additionally, social activities should be sponsored periodically to facilitate informal interactions between students and faculty.

Referral System

The development of a well-defined referral system and its effective use by faculty and peer advisers is essential to the delivery of the academic advising function. Advisers should be carefully instructed concerning the academic and non-academic referral services available on campus. They should also be knowledgeable of the various services available in the community. Specific information should be provided to them concerning the "what," "why," "when," "how," and "where" relative to each referral source. Participation in the training module, "Referral Services Available On and Off-Campus" should be required of all faculty and peer advisers.

Important sources of academic referral include: program head, department chairperson, records office, academic advising office, and learning skills center. Program heads and department chairpersons are important sources of substantive information pertaining to course content, program requirements, and career opportunities related to programs of study. The records office is an important source of procedural information concerning academic rules and regulations. The academic advising office houses the coordinator of academic advising, who, as a generalist adviser, can serve as a resource for general information concerning various programs and colleges of the institution. An academic information center should also be located in this office and should contain the latest academic information, including checksheets for all programs of study. This center should be readily available to students and faculty. The learning skills center is one of the latest academic support services to evolve and is a response to the increasing number of students who are deficient in the basic skills of writing, reading/study skills, and mathematics. Students can be referred to the learning skills center to receive special tutoring, supportive of their regular classroom instruction.

Essential non-academic referral sources include: career development and placement office, financial aid office, and mental health clinic. The career development and placement office provides an opportunity for students to clarify their educational goals by personalizing a complex information base concerning employment opportunities in various career fields. Career placement assistance upon graduation is another vital service provided by this office. Often a student's ability to stay in school will be influenced by the availability of adequate finances. Referral to the financial aid office may lead the student to sources of money that will insure his/her ability to continue in college. For students who experience emotional problems that prevent their coping with the rigors of academe, referral to the mental health clinic may alleviate major stress and frustration. Consequently, they will be able to deal more effectively with the competitive demands of academic life.

Information Support System

The design of this system facilitates the advising process by insuring that each adviser possesses comprehensive student information and current academic information. An accurate information base is critical to the delivery of the academic advising function.

Student information is defined as that information pertaining to the academic preparation and progress of each student. Information concerning academic preparation should include a profile of academic abilities and a summary of the initial counseling interview. The profile of academic abilities summarizes a student's standardized test scores (ACT or SAT), high school average in academic courses, placement test scores, and recommended entry-level coursework in English, reading, mathematics, and chemistry. Grade expectancy data should also be presented that includes a student's potential for success in science (programs requiring extensive coursework in college-level calculus and science) and non-science (programs not

requiring extensive coursework in college-level calculus and science) oriented curricula of the institution. A summary of the initial counseling interview should focus upon an analysis of the student's preparation to pursue a particular program(s) of interest. Naturally, such a discussion should reflect a synthesis of all pertinent entry-level information, including an evaluation of a student's motivation and readiness to engage in a particular program of study. The adviser should be instructed on how to use this information effectively in stage two advising; that is all advising which occurs subsequent to stage one advising or the initial contact with a student via a freshman counseling and advising program (Division of Undergraduate Studies, 1978, p. 3).

Monitoring the academic progress of the advisee is a critical advising function. To assist the adviser in this effort, a periodic information update of the advisee's progress is needed. The development of a computer-generated advisee progress report can provide this information (Kapraun, 1980, p. 2). This report should be distributed to each adviser one week prior to each pre-registration period, so the adviser has the information to assist the advisee in preparing a course schedule for the next term. More in-depth advising can be pursued as required by each student. Questions that the adviser should consider relative to each advisee's progress were reviewed in the discussion of adviser responsibilities.

The computerized advisee progress report should be presented in a systematic manner focusing upon data collection, data analysis, and conclusion. In regard to data collection, the following information should be included: grades from the preceding term, including term and cumulative averages; a current term schedule, incorporating drop-add actions; and any mid-term "D" or "F" grades for the current term. Analysis of this data will determine a student's progress in key survey courses pertaining to a program of study being considered. For

example, the performance of an engineering student in calculus and chemistry should be carefully monitored. The data analysis should also compare a student's cumulative average with a cumulative average which may be required for retention in a particular program of study. The engineering student, for example, may need a cumulative average of 2.5 after the completion of six terms (or two academic years) to continue in that program. On the basis of the data analysis, a conclusion should be made on whether the advisee is making satisfactory or unsatisfactory progress. If the student is making unsatisfactory progress, the appropriate campus referral(s) should be listed. Possible sources of referral may include: faculty adviser, program head, department chairperson, academic advising office, and learning skills center. The adviser should strongly urge the advisee to pursue the designated referrals.

A comprehensive academic information system is designed to keep advisers informed of pertinent information to perform their advising responsibilities. In addition to traditional sources of information such as catalogs and college/departmental publications, other sources of information are academic bulletins, academic information newsletters, a course guide, and an academic information center. An academic information bulletin is designed to publicize the latest academic and curricular changes. This publication should be written and distributed soon after the decision by a faculty senate is made that warrants adviser notification. The bulletin should be concise (no more than one page) and should focus on <u>one</u> particular change. Examples of publishable topics are "Withdrawal Policy Changes" (Kelly, 1976), "Course Drop Policy Revised" (Kelly, 1978), and "Entrance and Retention Requirement: Chemistry Majors" (Kelly, 1979). An academic information newsletter should be distributed at least once a term and should summarize academic rule and curricular changes for that particular term.

Other pertinent academic information can also be included. A course guide supplements the traditional catalog by providing a detailed description of courses as they are taught at a particular institution (Kapraun, Coldren, 1981, p. 67). It is a guide to answer student questions about courses: "What's that course about?" "What are the course requirements?" "How does an instructor evaluate my learning in that course?" This publication is a valuable source of information for the adviser during the preregistration period. As aforementioned, the academic information center is located in the academic advising office and serves as a depository for the latest academic information distributed by colleges and departments. Students, as well as advisers, should have access to the center and should be encouraged to use it whenever the need arises.

Academic Advising: Will It Make a Difference?

Thus far, we have reviewed the seven components of an academic advising program that emphasizes student retention. We have proposed that an advising program which incorporates these components will be a critical factor in improving student retention. Still, there may be doubt concerning the impact of advising on retention. "Will it really make a difference?"

The answer to this question is an emphatic "YES"; however, we must stress the significance of certain qualifying statements in making such a definite response. First, advising should not be viewed as a "cure-all" for the retention problem. As mentioned previously, advising is <u>one</u> of eight dimensions of a campus-wide retention program. Without the concomitant development of the other seven dimensions, the interactive effect between advising and these other important factors obviously will not occur, thus minimizing the impact of advising. Second, a comprehensive retention-oriented advising program cannot be achieved within a short period of time. Conservatively, three to five years will be needed to

produce a refined and cost-effective program. Hopefully, in an era of higher education increasingly characterized by a demand for immediate and quantifiable results, the academic decision maker will have the patience to realize that an advising program, much like the development of a traditional academic program, requires adequate time to be developed, implemented, and revised. Third, the development of the proposed advising program will require the best efforts of a professional higher education manager. The complexities and demands of a retention-oriented advising program will require sophisticated leadership and managerial skills. Additionally, the individual must have a strong student orientation and a respect for the unique qualities of academe. Fourth, the academic leader of each institution must realize that the seven components of the proposed model must be developed with respect to the unique requirements of his/her institution. Depending on the particular situation, some components may require more emphasis at one institution and less emphasis at another. Each institution should carefully evaluate its advising needs and respond accordingly. A comprehensive needs assessment must be the first step in developing an advising program truly responsive to student and faculty needs. A fifth qualifying statement focuses upon the critical importance of organizing the academic advising office as a major academic unit. In addition to providing support to the various colleges or divisions of an institution, the advising unit should be capable of enrolling and registering those students who are undecided about their educational goals and are in need of in-depth academic advising. To deliver the academic advising function effectively, the advising unit should be organized on an equal par with the colleges or academic divisions of the institution. The administrative head should report directly to the chief academic officer of the campus. Undoubtedly, the organizational status of the advising unit will be a critical factor

in maximizing the impact of the advising function.

If these five issues are effectively addressed at each institution, then it is highly probable that the retention-oriented concept of academic advising will make a real difference in contributing to the development of a positive, personalized relationship between student and faculty adviser. Such a relationship will encourage the student to persist toward the realization of an appropriate educational goal.

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